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LIFE AND LETTERS OF WASHINGTON ALLSTON.

BY JARED B. FLAGG.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS.

A book of 426 pages on Washington Allston, with numerous autotype reproductions from his paintings! Was there really a demand for such an elaborate memorial of the painter of "Belshazzar's Feast" in the Boston Museum? Only a certain set of old fashioned amateurs, who cannot keep pace with the rapid strides of modern art, and who still cling to Allston's memory as to a sort of American Titian, may have looked out for such a book, and now greet it with all the mild enthusiasm left to old age. The younger generation, however, aspiring to understand modern art, which sacrifices all ideas and feelings to technical accomplishment, has but little in common with the austere dilettantism of Washington Allston.

The author of the book undoubtedly meant well, and absolved his duty in a masterly manner, a biography compiled with such loving care and got up in such a stately manner is seldom seen in the market. The gathering of all the written and verbal memorandas, manuscripts, and letters necessary for this reliable biography which dwells on every detail of the painter's private life, and every minutiae of his public career, must have been a work of years. It deserves to become the standard Allston biography for all his admirers. Based entirely on facts, the impartial reader can find no fault with it, except it were with the bombast and eulogical comments, which Mr. Flagg deems necessary to introduce into every chapter.

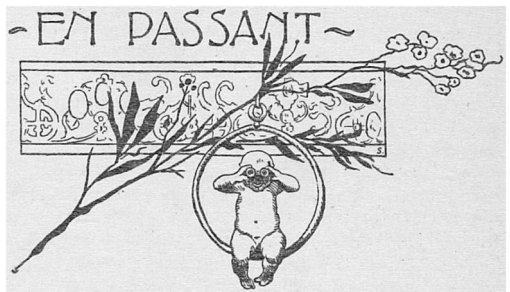
Washington Allston could be treated in a friendly manner without receiving the culte of a demi-god and absurd comparison with the cinque cento masters. As a man of artistic temperament and ambition, he stood high above even the more advanced of his period, and Longfellow's, Lowell's and Emerson's admiration for him, can probably be explained by the sympathy they felt for that quiet enthusiast whose dreary fate it was to paint "under debt" in Cambridgeport. What a Hades Cambridgeport must have been seventy-five years ago to a man of Allston's character!

And we, standing in the full glare of sunlight when we look back to the past, and perceive his dignified figure against the dark, sombre background of his unfinished "Belshazzar's Feast," with its heavy architectonic background and life-size figures, even the most radical impressionist among us should feel something like reverence for that man, who ever shunned popularity and held nothing dearer than his art. Many of our mercenary shyster painters might go to the Boston Museum of Fine arts and learn something of that sublime butcher, who was sincere even when he made such daubs as "Lorenzo and Jessica."

His nobility of character can best be traced in his outline drawings, they are firm, graceful, and

competent, but he invariably failed to convey the idea they expressed into his finished pictures, which have but little merit in regard to coloring, values, or modeling. He was an imitator all his life and very often a copyist as in "The Sisters," where a whole figure is borrowed from Titian's Lavinia. He liked the architectonic background of Titian, the Michael Angelo attitudes of Tintoretto, the purity of design of Raphael, and now and then demonstrated in his paintings the result of these studies. Of all his paintings that are at present in America his "Angel, liberating St. Peter from Prison" in the insane asylum at Worcester, is the only one that has decided merit. The slender figure of the angel, robed in white, his sweet Raphaelic face framed in by waves of brown hair, is beautiful and almost worth a trip to Worcester. His portraits like those of Coleridge and his mother represent, perhaps, his best work though they can in no way stand comparison with the portraits of Gilbert Stuart.

The admiration he aroused among his European colleagues like that expressed by Leslie in his interesting correspondence with the American painter can easily be explained. The art of painting, which has fallen asleep with the decadence of the Dutch school, was once more in an embryonic state. It was the time of Davids and Overbecks, a time devoid of great masters. Thus a young American artist, who was only temporarily in Europe and who displayed an over abundance of ambition and ideas, could easily be overrated.



Paris will have its next World's Fair in 1900.

Veretchagin is employed at a series of pictures, depicting the French invasion into Russia in 1812.

The design for the title page of THE ART CRITIC is by Mr. E. B. Bird, of Boston.

A new column headed "American Art Gossip," will be introduced in the second number.

Catulle Mendes, the well known writer of frivolous stories made recently a peculiar confession in the "Confidences de Salon," i. e. answers made by celebrities, to questions put by a Paris journal. The question, "Ce que je voudrais être?" he answered with "Hugo, Wagner, or God."

The German art exhibit at the Chicago Fair utterly failed to convey to Americans a correct idea of the importance of modern German art. Of the recognized masters, only Adolf Menzel—of whom French critics have said "we have everything that Germany has in art except a Menzel,"—was satisfactorily represented.

The successor to Albert Wolff's art column in the *Figaro* is Emile Bergerat, under the pseudonym "Caliban," a very brilliant journalist and literati. He is by far a better writer in his essays than Wolff's Parisian jargon ever proved to be, but he is apt to forget in writing his invariably clever bonmots that an art critic should be an homme sérieux.

The Parisian public of today does not seem to take the same interest in ballet dancing as it did under the Second Empire, and yet it still possesses the finest prima ballerinas and corps de ballet in the world. Certainly with Maury in "La Muette," with Subra in "Coppelia," with Laus, Cornalba, Hirsch, Sanlaville, and young Desire, Paris owns a diadem of pearls that would be difficult to match even in Vienna, St. Petersburg, or Milano.

It is striking how much the so called *milieu* of a country is sometimes reflected in the population. Thus, for example, in the Swedish province Bahuslan, the old "Wike," the original home of the Vikings. The physiognomies of the fishermen and their families remind the traveler of the mackerel that is caught there in great abundance; their pale complexion resembles the grayish whiteness of the cliffs, and when they call to each other their voices have the hard, metallic sound of the screeching of the sea-birds.

Once on a time two beautiful maidens went bathing, one was named Falsehood and the other Truth. After gambling to their hearts content in the water, Falsehood stepped out first and, true to her nature, she stole and dressed herself in the robes of Truth and ran away. When Truth came out she found the robes of Falsehood lying on the bank, she, however, true to her nature, would not don them but went her way as she was, and that is why we hear so seldom of "Naked Truth."

Cæsar Franc, next to Alexander Guilmant the most popular Parisian organist has always enjoyed a local reputation of being a composer of sacred symphonies. The recent first rendering of his "Beatitudes," however, a series of choruses with orchestral accompaniment by the Colonne concert in the theatre of the Chatelet, has almost made him famous. Some critics go as far as to assert that it is the greatest and purest musical composition of the last thirty years. The words of the composition are borrowed from the Sermon on the Mount. There is a chorus of the "pure in heart," of those "who hunger and thirst after righteousness," etc. After each chorus comes the recompense expressed in the words of Christ, sung by a barytone voice. That the elite of society considered this performance the great musical event of last season can be explained. The public has grown indifferent to the finished forms of old melody. The transparency of the thematic work of classic masters, the conscientious treatment of counterpoint is considered tiresome. People yawn at a graceful Coda dying away in clear sounds, or a pedal note with correct harmony. Applause and laurel wreaths are accorded only to "Tristan and Ysault," the mystical "Parsifal" and the church music of Bruneau's "Dream." The musical listener has the habit of developing a little for himself the motive of the piece he hears. The manner, however, in which Cæsar Franc develops it is a complete surprise. It seems that music, in order to be fashionable at present, must either simulate religious devotion, or confuse by its grotesque form. When a consonant interval is most expected a dissonant interval occurs, and when a phrase is supposed to end in an easily eligible cadence, it invariably breaks off in the midst of a bar. The keys and intervals are subject to sudden changes. In the orchestra a polyphony calls attention to four or five different sides at once, as if five orators were speaking simultaneously. The theme, though it is clearly outlined at first, becomes so vague that it can no longer be followed. The tones are poured forth in endless and chromatically rising and falling trios so as to completely exhaust the listener.

The scientific relation of color and sound has always interested the scientist, but it has only attracted general attention since its introduction into poetry by the French authors,

Rimbaud and Rene Ghil. They associate a certain sensation of color with sound and require words not only to call forth musical emotion but to exercise at the same time an æsthetic influence as color harmony. The critics had naturally to discuss whether the "hearing of color" was an advantage or not. Some asserted that it was the sole privilege of very delicately organized nervous natures, and others that it depended on an accidental, not normal connection of the nervous tissues of the optical and acoustic centre in the brain. The French eye doctor, Suarez de Mendoza, who has written the most reliable book on the subject says that 'color hearing' (he calls it *pseudo photesthésie*) is sometimes the result of an association of ideas which originated in youth, sometimes that of special brain activity, the nature of which remains a secret, and which might have a certain similarity to 'hallucination.' It is scarcely to be doubted that color hearing is generally a result of the association of ideas, the origin of which remains obscure, because the interlacing of color and sound may sometimes be founded on vague perceptions in early childhood which were not strong enough to attract attention and therefore remained unconscious. That this connection of nerves is called forth accidentally is proved by the fact that every color hearer attributes a different color to a certain sound. Thus Rene Ghil considers the flute yellow; Hoffmann whom Goethe mentions in his treatise on color, finds it cherry red. To Rimbaud the letter "A" appears black; to patients, mentioned by Suarez, it appears blue, etc.

The peculiar coloring of modern painters, the impressionists, tachists and mosaists, the grey in grey, violet in violet colorists, the archaists, the vibristes and color-orgiasts etc., becomes comprehensible when we study the researches of Dr. Charcot and his school in regard to visual disturbances. The painters who affirm that they paint nature as they see it, tell the truth, but they suffer from hysteria or other nervous derangements. Those who are affected with nystagmus or trembling of the eyeballs see everything trembling, restless and in vague outlines. Nearly all hysterical people are affected with insensibility in one or the other part of the retina, as a rule the insensible places are connected and situated on the exterior half of it. In these cases the full vision is more or less limited and appears to them not as a circle but as a picture which is bound by a luminous zig zag line. Sometimes the insensitive spots are not connected but scattered all over the retina. In this case they experience voids in their field of vision and will be inclined to combine larger and smaller duties which do not belong to each other. This insensibility does not necessarily render a person blind to all colors but only to one or a few. If the color sensation is entirely lacking (achromatopsy) he sees everything in a uniform grey but is conscious of the different degrees of light. This does much to explain Puvion de Chavannes, Bastien Lepage, Liebermann, Uhde, etc. As for the color orgist Besnard, his love for loud yellows, blues and reds, are explained by Dr. Gilles de la Tourette, who informs us that red and blue are peripheral colors (i. e. they are seen first by the most exterior parts of the retina) and can still be perceived when the sensibility for all other colors has disappeared. With some dull sighted persons (amblyopsy) the perception of red is the last to disappear, with others blue. Red has another peculiarity which explains the fondness some painters have for it, Rochegrosse for instance. Binet has proven that some colors have a depressing influence on the active nerves, while others, and in particular red, have a dynamogenic influence. Purple, the color of mourning with some nations, is on the contrary depressive, thus the purple shadow of the impressionists and the general purple aspects of nature in modern pictures (which does not exist for the healthy eye) has probably originated in the melancholia of modern painters.

Few people are aware that Lady Tennyson, who never offered inspiration to the laureate's muse, possesses some remarkable talent as a composer. The music she wrote to her husband's poems has never reached the public at large but is well known in English drawing-rooms and among the rustic inhabitants of Sussex.